

STATEMENT BY DUSTY TALLMAN, PRESIDENT,  
COLORADO ASSOCIATION OF WHEAT GROWERS  
TO FORUM ON AGRICULTURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

On behalf of Colorado's wheat growers I wish to thank you for your continued support—in good times as well as bad. We especially appreciate your leadership and commitment.

While it may sound like a broken record, the farm crisis continues to impact the lives of wheat growers every day. USDA figures show that Colorado wheat prices are averaging only \$2.20 per bushel so far this marketing year. Wheat prices are now at 45 percent of the high achieved in the 1995-96 market year. Wheat prices this last summer hit a 22-year record low. That's worse than anything we say in the early 1980's—the era that saw numerous farm foreclosures and massive farm aid. And wheat prices have actually dropped another 22 cents per bushel since last summer.

After three years of low prices, the farm crisis is not going away. USDA's best analysts have predicted that wheat prices will not improve without some sort of adverse weather problem somewhere in the world. USDA will update its price projections at this year's Outlook Forum in late February. However, current estimates predict another 18 months of low wheat prices.

In the face of continued financial stress, some have started to blame the 1996 Farm Bill. While the Bill did not prevent this disaster, it is not fair to claim that it caused it. Colorado wheat growers support the concept of "Freedom to Farm." We like having greater flexibility and the risk associated with it. Today's crisis would have been much more devastating had we been forced to abide by the old, top-down management of previous farm bills.

However, while we do not want "Freedom to Farm" repealed, there is clearly a need to improve federal farm policy before more farmers are forced off their land. The 1996 Farm Bill lacks a reliable farm safety net. With no floor, wheat prices continue to drop.

The Colorado Association of Wheat Growers (CAWG) believes that we must add a country-cyclical economic assistance payment to the farm bill. For two years, we have relied on emergency spending to provide the assistance we need. This ad hoc system should be replaced with a statutory payment triggered by low prices.

The National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) is currently developing an outline for just such a payment. The plan will be finalized at the NAWG annual convention in February and presented during the House Agriculture Committee's field hearings this spring and summer.

There are also other things you and your colleagues can do today to help wheat growers. We continue to await congressional action on tax reform, Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China; crop insurance reform and sanction reform.

I am pleased to be with you today and pledge the support of CAWG to help you find real solutions.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, it was a good forum. The information derived must be used to ensure agriculture is not forgotten.

As the House prepares to reauthorize the 1996 Farm Bill the conclusion of the Colorado agriculture forum should be considered by our colleagues.

## INTRODUCTION OF CARE 21

### HON. NICK J. RAHALL II

OF WEST VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 30, 2000

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation to restore our Nation's historic commitment to insuring lifetime health care for retired coal miners. Joining me in introducing this bill, which will be known as CARE 21, is a bipartisan group of our colleagues: BOB NEY, SPENCER BACHUS, RICK BOUCHER, TIM HOLDEN, RON KLING, ALAN MOLLOHAN, JOHN MURTHA, TED STRICKLAND, and BOB WISE.

Enactment this year of CARE 21, the "Coal Accountability and Retired Employee Act for the 21st Century," is necessary if we are to avoid seeing a curtailment in health care coverage for thousands of retired coal miners and their widows. Indeed, this would not be the first time that Congress has acted in this matter. In 1992, in what is known as the "Coal Act" enacted as part of the Energy Policy Act, Congress established the UMW Combined Benefit Fund (CBF) combining the union's 1950 and 1974 benefit plans. This action came in response to changes in the coal industry which created a large class of 'orphaned' miners whose benefits were no longer being paid by an active coal company. A key feature of the Coal Act was the financing of orphaned miner health care costs through an annual transfer of a portion of the interest which accrues to the unappropriated balance in the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund.

Simply put, in restoring abandoned coal mine lands we must not abandon the retired coal miner.

The Coal Act was working well, health care for retirees whose former employers could be identified would be financed by premiums paid by those companies while to date, \$193 million in reclamation fund interest and a one-time \$68 million additional appropriation has financed orphaned miner care.

However, a rash of recent adverse court decisions have been rendered which once again is threatening the financial integrity of the program. Among them, what is known as the "Chater" decision which overturned the Social Security Administration's premium determination reducing premiums by 10 percent. Another court decision ordered the CBF to refund about \$40 million in contributions. And the Supreme Court's decision in the Eastern Enterprise case added some 8,000 retirees to the orphaned miner rolls. The result: Without a new source of funds, the CBF will face a cash shortage beginning next year forcing the curtailment and ultimately the cessation of health care coverage for some 70,000 retirees and widows whose average age is 78.

CARE 21 takes a relatively simple and straightforward approach to addressing this impending crisis. First, it would transfer the amount of interest that is currently languishing in the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund to the CBF that was not previously made available for orphaned miner health care. This would provide an immediate infusion of roughly \$172 million. Second, it would lift the restriction in current law that reclamation fund interest can only be used for orphaned miner health care. This action would serve to cover future shortfalls in the CBF.

I would note that interest accrues to the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund at a rate of about \$83 million a year. Meanwhile, there is a \$1.7 billion unappropriated balance in the Fund. CARE 21 in no way adversely affects the abandoned mine reclamation program. The principal remains intact for that effort, and is fueled by annual reclamation fees assessed on every ton of mined coal which finances the program.

As such, one of the key features of CARE 21 is that the general taxpayer is not being called upon to pay for retired coal miner health care, but rather, the coal industry itself would provide for this coverage through the interest which accrues to the fees it pays into the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund.

Mr. Speaker, I noted earlier there is a historical commitment to providing health care for retired coal miners. This is a unique situation in that what would normally be a matter solely for the private sectors is not in this instance. The genesis for this situation dates back to 1946 in an agreement between then-UMW President John L. Lewis and the Federal Government to resolve a long-running labor dispute. At the time, President Truman had ordered the Interior Secretary to take possession of all bituminous coal mines in the country in an effort to break a United Mine Workers of America strike. Eventually, Lewis and Secretary Julius Krug reached an agreement that included an industry-wide, miner controlled health plan.

In fact, the 1992 Coal Act itself was formulated partly on the basis of recommendations from the Coal Commission, established by former Labor Secretary Libby Dole, which in 1990 recommended a statutory obligation to help finance the UMW's Health Benefit Funds.

Mr. Speaker, the people covered by this health care program spent their careers producing the energy which powered this Nation to greatness. We must not forsake them. We must not cast them adrift in their later years, robbed of the health care they so desperately need.

## PERSONAL EXPLANATION

### HON. JACK METCALF

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 30, 2000

Mr. METCALF. Mr. Speaker, on March 28, I was excused from the business of the House. Had I been here, I would have voted "yes" on rollcall vote 76 (H.R. 2412); "yes" on rollcall vote 77 (H. Con. Res. 292); "yes" on rollcall vote 78 (H. Con. Res. 269); "yes" on rollcall vote 79 (H.R. 5), The Senior Citizens' Freedom to Work Act.

## 2000 EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT

SPEECH OF

### HON. VAN HILLEARY

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 29, 2000

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under